

## No Need to Fear

John 14

“The only thing we have to fear is ... fear itself.” Have you ever heard those words before? They are from Franklin D. Roosevelt’s inaugural address given on March 4, 1933.

Fear, according to dictionary.com, is “a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined.”<sup>i</sup> – did you catch that? Whether the fear is real or imagined!

*As many of you know Jeff and I were on vacation in Alaska last week and in a moment of bravery I signed us up to go on a Zipline experience. Some of you also know that I’m not all that great with heights (Jeff was wondering about my sanity in signing us up for this because of that struggle). But it was a totally awesome experience! I will admit there were a couple moments where my fear of falling kicked in and I put my arm around the tree – but there really was no way I was going to fall – I was strapped into a body harness and tethered to the ziplines by two different ropes and we had two guides making sure the experience was safe and fun. My fear - was all imagined.*

Fear does serve a healthy function. This emotion triggered by a perceived threat is a basic survival mechanism response essential to keep us safe.<sup>ii</sup> “It is the canary in the coal mine: warning of potential danger. A dose of fright can keep a child from running across a busy road or an adult from smoking a pack of cigarettes. Fear is the appropriate reaction to a burning building or growling dog.”<sup>iii</sup>

But fear can also be destructive. One of the articles I read this week noted that fear causes stress, anger, anxiety, fright, horror, panic, and sadness. It impacts our physical health – it can cause cardio damage, GI problems, accelerate aging even premature death, brain damage and mental health issues.<sup>iv</sup>

But more concerning to me as your pastor is that fear has a damaging impact on our spiritual wellbeing. In his book *Fearless*, Max Lucado said: “Fear corrodes our confidence in God’s goodness.”<sup>v</sup> “When fear shapes our lives, safety becomes our god. When safety becomes our god, we worship the risk-free life.”<sup>vi</sup>

“Can the safety lover do anything great? Can the risk-averse accomplish noble deeds? For God? For others? No. The fear-filled cannot love deeply; love is risky. They cannot give to the poor. Benevolence has no guarantee of return. The fear-filled cannot dream wildly. What if their dreams sputter and fall from the sky? The worship of safety emasculates greatness. No wonder Jesus wages such a war against fear.

His most common command emerges from the “fear not” genre. The gospels list some 125 Christ-issued imperatives. Of these, twenty-one urge us to “not be afraid” or to “not fear” or to “have courage,” “take heart,” or “be of good cheer.” The second most common command appears on eight occasions. If quantity is any indicator, Jesus takes our fears seriously. The one statement he said more than any other was this: Don’t be afraid.”<sup>vii</sup>

- “So don’t be afraid. You are worth much more than many sparrows.” (Mt. 10:31 NIV)
- “Don’t worry about everyday life—whether you have enough...” (Mathew 6:25)
- “It’s all right. I am here! Don’t be afraid.” (Matthew 14:27 NCV)
- “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)
- “Don’t be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me.... I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.” (John 14:1-3 NLT)
- “.. don’t be troubled or afraid.” (John 14:27)

Jesus doesn’t want you to live in a state of fear. This is why his last teaching to his disciples on the night of the Passover celebration in the Upper Room (our reading for today), includes instruction to not be afraid.

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”* (John 14:1) It’s possible to not be troubled by putting our trust in God. Jesus said we know God the Father because we know Jesus. And Jesus promised his disciples that even though he would be going away, he would not leave his followers as orphans, they would receive the Holy Spirit to live with in them, to teach them everything, to remind them of everything Jesus taught them and to give them peace of heart and mind. Jesus wants them to know: they’ll never face the future without his help. So don’t be troubled or afraid. (14:26-27).

Then he makes this great promise: *“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* (John 14:2-3)

I love how Max Lucado explains this:

*“We westerners might miss the wedding images, but you can... [be sure] Jesus’ listeners didn’t. This was a groom-to-a-bride promise. Upon receiving the permission of both families, the groom returned to the home of his father and built a home for his bride. He “prepared a place.”*

By promising to do the same for us, Jesus elevates funerals to the same hope level as weddings. From his perspective the trip to the cemetery and the walk down the aisle warrant identical excitement...Both celebrate a new era, name and home. In both the groom walks the bride away on his arm. Jesus is your coming groom. *“I will come and get you....”* He will meet you at the altar. Your final glimpse of life will trigger your first glimpse of him.”<sup>viii</sup>

But how can we be sure Jesus will keep this promise? Do we have any guarantee that his words are true? The answer is found in the empty tomb.

*On our trip, Jeff and I met a man who is a Messianic Jew. I asked him to explain what he meant by that term – he told me he was Jewish by culture – born and raised in a Jewish family, went to*

*Hebrew school and had his Bar Mitzvah. He was a good Jewish man. And that meant when his wife, who had grown up Catholic, decided she wanted to go to church he went with to be supportive. It was at this church that he heard about the empty tomb and it got his attention. You see he is an oral surgeon and works with the medical examiner's office identifying bodies with dental records and at times is called to testify in court. Through this work he has learned that you can always find traces of a dead body – you can't hide a body. On top of that, the Romans wouldn't have hid Jesus' body – that was no benefit to them and the Jewish leaders needed the body as proof that they were right. The fact that the disciples couldn't find Jesus' body convinced this Jewish man that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is true, and if the resurrection is true, then everything else Jesus said and did must also be true.*

The empty tomb is the proof, the guarantee that Jesus' words and promises are true. We don't have to fear, we can have confidence in God and peace in our hearts. Fear may fill our world, but it doesn't have to fill our hearts. So, let's live with faith in God so we can fear less tomorrow than you do today. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/fear>

<sup>ii</sup> "Impact of Fear and Anxiety" <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/security/facing-fear/impact-fear>

<sup>iii</sup> Max Lucado, *Fearless: Imagine Your Life without Fear* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 12-13.

<sup>iv</sup> "Impact of Fear and Anxiety"

<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/security/facing-fear/impact-fear>

<sup>v</sup> Lucado, 9.

<sup>vi</sup> Lucado, 10.

<sup>vii</sup> Lucado, 10.

<sup>viii</sup> Lucado, 118-119.